

Jim Shimberg, Sr.

by Bill Rose

May 1, 2003

[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

This is an interview with Jim Shimberg, Sr. (JS), who was the original developer of Town n' Country. The interview is being conducted on May the 1st, 2003 at West Gate Regional Library in Town n' Country. The interviewer is Bill Rose (BR), representing the Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library system oral history collection project.

Bill Rose (BR): *And now I turn over the mike over to you, Mr. Shimberg. Let's hear () recollection ().*

Jim Shimberg (JS): Good morning! You can interrupt me any time you want ().

BR: *Yeah! Yeah, sure.*

JS: This is Jim Shimberg, with Bill Rose. [Pause] I guess, among other things, that I'm known or remembered as one of the original builders or developers of the Town n' Country Park area. I came to Tampa in the late '50s-- in 1957, 1958-- together with two associates of mine, Charles LaMonte and my brother, Mandell Shimberg, Jr. We had previously been involved in the home-building business in Westchester County, New York, which is just north of New York City. And--.
[Pause]

BR: *Just want to ramble on?*

JS: A little bit about myself: I was born in Syracuse, New York in 1923- a long time ago! [Chuckle] My father was a doctor in the Veteran's Administration in the days before World War II, and as a result, I lived in a lot of places in the country. I think I went to like 18 different schools from the time I entered kindergarten until the time I finally finished law school. I served for 3 ½ years in World War II in the Air Force. And after the war, and after the war, I went to the University of Chicago Law School, where I graduated in 1949. I then went to New York City, where my parents lived, and practiced law for--, between 1949 and 1958.

Somewhat by chance, I started to represent builders and developers, some of whom didn't have a lot of money. And so the only way you could get compensated for your services was to take an interest in the job. One--. The prime builder that I represented in the New York area was a man by the name of Charles LaMonte, who in 1957 decided to move to Tampa, Florida. I think between 1957 and 1958, I made like 18 trips between New York and Tampa. And I either wanted to practice law in New York, or I wanted to be involved in the

building and development business in Tampa. So I--, my wife and I, at the end of 1958, moved down here permanently.

BR: *How did you travel back then on all these trips to Florida?*

JS: Well, it wasn't easy like it is now. There were non--, there were no non-stop flights between New York and Tampa. In order to get from New York to Tampa in those days, you had to change in Jacksonville. And sometime, you had to wait four or five hours in the airport in Jacksonville.

BR: *Where did they land- at Drew Field?*

JS: Yeah, in Drew Field- that's right. In the old airport in Tampa- not that far from here.

The first, the first homes that we built in Tampa-- originally, the company was known as Lamonte-Shimberg Builders-- was in the Interbay section of Tampa, where we built 30 homes in 1957 and 1958. Then in late '57 or early 1958, we also started a job in Brandon which was known as Everina Homes. At that time, Brandon was no more than really a wide spot in the road. There were very few people that lived in the area.

Sometime in 1958, a real estate broker, whose name I believe was Bill Winfield, said that he's got a tremendous deal that he would like to show us. So we got in the car, and it seemed to me we drove forever. And eventually, we arrived at the corner of Hillsborough Avenue and Hanley Road. At that time, there were very, very few people that lived in what's now the Town n' Country area. As a matter of fact, I think from the corner of Hillsborough Avenue and Hanley Road, you could count on the fingers of one hand the number of people that lived within a radius of two or three miles.

Mr. Winfield showed us a piece of property, which at the time appeared to be a dairy farm, owned by a gentleman by the name of Wayne Webb. The dairy barn was on the--, was north of Hillsborough Avenue where the Town n' Country Plaza shopping center is now. And Mr. Webb lived on the south side of Hillsborough Avenue in a small house where Ranch House is now.

BR: *Ranch House, the restaurant.*

JS: Ranch House Restaurant- that's right.

We, we eventually concluded a deal with Mr. Webb in which we bought 100 acres of land, which was south of Hillsborough Avenue between Memorial and Hillsborough. And then he gave us an option to buy an additional four or five hundred acres of land north of Hillsborough Avenue.

Just as an aside, Mr. Webb told the story that he had bought the five or six hundred acres where his dairy farm was located in the 1940s from a man by the name of Mr. Hanley, and that Mr. Hanley had bought five or six thousand acres of land in this general vicinity in the mid-'30s from the Exchange National Bank for \$5 an acre. Mr. Hanley is the-- , was the father-in-law of Con-- , of former Congressman Sam Gibbons. And of course, Hanley Road, which now is the main artery that goes from Hillsborough to Waters Avenue, was named after Mr. Hanley.

The first homes that we built in the Town n' Country area- the development actually opened in September of 1959. The homes were located just north of Memorial Highway, where Town n' Country Boulevard comes off Memorial Highway. The first 50 homes, I remember, sold for \$9,000 apiece on 40-year FHA mortgages, and the monthly payments, including principal, interest, taxes, and insurance, was \$52 a month. [Coughs] Excuse me. You probably couldn't pay the electric bill for \$52 a month now.

As time went on, the Town n' Country development progressed from those first 50 homes that were built just north of Memorial Highway. And as it proceeded further north-- eventually in 1961, I think-- reaching and crossing Hillsborough Avenue, and then going eventually another two miles north to Waters and actually somewhat north of Waters, the houses tended to become somewhat bigger and more expensive. From the first 50 houses that sold for \$9,000, I think the most expensive houses that we built and sold in the Town n' Country area were in Twelve Oaks, which is just south of Waters Avenue, which-- . Some of them sold in the neighborhood of fifty, sixty, seventy thousand dollars.

BR: *What approximate date was that?*

JS: Well, we started in 1959. In 1961, we had finished roughly 500 houses south of Hillsborough Avenue. And in 1961, we started to build north of Hillsborough Avenue. We built an office building for ourself, which is still there, just north of Hillsborough on Town n' Country Boulevard. I can't remember who's in it now. We--

BR: *East side or west side?*

JS: It's on the, it's on the west side of Hillsborough Avenue. On the east side is the shopping center.

BR: *Right.*

JS: And then across the street is this office building, which was our original office building, and there may be a health--

BR: *Health care.*

JS: Health care in there.

BR: *Kitchen products.*

JS: That's right. So in 1961, we started to build north of Hillsborough Avenue. And at that time, we also built what was originally the Town n' Country Swim Club-- which was also just north of Hillsborough Avenue-- which doesn't exist anymore. And I think where the swim club was originally is now a Buddhist church. [Pause] Isn't it?

BR: *Right, and the remains of the swimming pool are still there.*

JS: [Chuckle] OK.

BR: *If you were an archaeologist, you could discover it.*

JS: All right; good. Also at that time, in '61 I think, we built the first commercial property in the Town n' Country area, which was on the south side of Hillsborough Avenue where the Ranch House restaurant is- small strip shopping center. Originally on the corner of Hillsborough and Town n' Country Boulevard on the south side, I believe there was a gas station. The gas station doesn't exist anymore- I think there's a cleaners there now.

So as we started to build north of Hillsborough Avenue, the houses sold in the vicinity of \$20,000. And as they kept going, they went up in price. And as I say, eventually the most expensive houses were probably in the Twelve Oaks area that sold for sixty, seventy thousand dollars, some of them. All the homes today in Town n' Country are selling or reselling for prices far in excess of what we originally sold them to the people. I don't know how many of the residents of Town n' Country bought here originally, but anybody that did could probably sell their house for two and three times what they paid for it.

BR: *How about the interest rates in those days?*

JS: Well, the--, on the first 50 houses that sold for \$9,000, the interest rates on a VA or FHA mortgage were 4 percent. Then as time went on, interest rates went up and down. I think probably in the time that we built the homes in Town n' Country, stretching from 1959 until the early 1970s, the interest rates were all over the map, and at one time probably got as high as 11, 12 percent. Most--. The--.

We built in the Town n' Country area approximately six or seven thousand houses. Almost all the houses were sold to people who either bought them on VA mortgages, which meant that they put little or no down payment, or on FHA mortgages, where there were modest down payments. Thousands of people,

because of this type of financing, were probably enabled to buy a house who otherwise would not have been able to. I think, in its time, originally, Town n' Country was a prime example of truly affordable housing.

Now, what else can I tell you that you think might be of interest?

BR: *Building codes. Have you seen much change in the building codes?*

JS: You know, over the years, there hasn't really been a great deal of change in the building codes. They've gotten somewhat stricter with reference to things such as wind load, and--, so that the homes would hold up better in the event of a hurricane. They--. The materials that were used in houses--, that are used in houses today are really not that different from what was used forty, fifty years ago. There is some difference. The original homes we built in Town n' Country I think all had terrazzo floors.

BR: *And louvered jalousie windows.*

JS: Louvered windows- that's right.

Terrazzo floors are something that not used at all today in residential homes- still used somewhat in commercial construction. And the louvered windows tended to leak. And--

BR: *And they were said to be a security risk. ().*

JS: That's right. So they don't use louvered windows anymore.

Originally, I don't think the original homes were air conditioned. But as time went on, air conditioning became pretty much a normal thing in building in Florida. I don't know if Florida would have progressed to the point that it has today without air conditioning.

When we first started Town n' Country, there was maybe three or four million people that lived in the state of Florida. Today, there's something like sixteen million people. In the Town n' Country area, you could've counted on the fingers of one hand, as I said, the number of people that lived at the time we bought the land. That means maybe, maybe ten people. In the area that's Town n' Country today, there--, probably sixty, seventy thousand people live. That's more people than live in the smallest five or six counties in the state of Florida. The--.

Demographically and ethnically, the people in Town n' Country have changed somewhat. I think as time went on with re-sales and one thing or another, the population of Town n' Country has become some more Hispanic than it was originally. We also sold a great many homes to people stationed at MacDill Field over the years that we built in Town n' Country. And I think we were among the

first communities in the Tampa area that sold houses to African Americans. And to the best of my knowledge, which I think is a good thing, I don't ever remember that there was any great difficulty, by reason of the fact that African Americans started to buy houses in an area like Town n' Country.

But I do remember, I think, the first house that we sold to an African American. The gentleman said that he wanted to come in and talk to me. And he was a very nice man- I think he was a computer programmer with IBM, and I think his wife was a school teacher.

And he said, "There is just one question I want to ask you." And I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Are these houses restricted?" And I got a little flustered, and he said, "Oh no," he said, "You don't know what I mean. I know they aren't restricted as far as race and color is concerned, because that's illegal."

But he said, "What I mean," you know, he said, "I'm paying \$22,000 for this house. Are there restrictive covenants that would prevent somebody from building a \$10,000 house across the street from mine?" Which I assured him there were, you know. And he said, "You know," he said, "You got to realize that the black man is just as concerned about these things as the white man." And I thought that was good.

With all the homes that were built over the years in Town n' Country, obviously the area needed schools. In those days, which is somewhat different today, even if you were going to build a large development, there was no requirement that the builder or developer donate land to the school system for schools.

However, we always figured that the more--, the better the schools were in the area and the sooner the schools were built, the more--, the better the community it would be, and the easier it would be to sell homes. So over the years, we donated, I believe, five sites to the Hillsborough County School Board for which they paid nothing, which are now the sites of Town and Country Elementary, Morgan--, Webb Junior High School, Morgan Woods Elementary, Woodbridge Elementary, and I think there was one other one.

BR: *Dickenson.*

JS: Not Dickenson.

BR: *Not Dickenson.*

JS: Not Dickenson. It's the one north of Waters Avenue- Bellamy.

BR: *Mm-hmm. On Wilsky Boulevard.*

JS: That's right.

Today people call the Town n' Country--. You can't exactly tell what they mean by Town n' Country. What we meant was the actual land that we platted and build homes. But now the whole area is somewhat called the Town n' Country area, and it includes a lot more than the area that we actually built in.

BR: *Well, this raises an interesting point, because there is a certain amount of contentiousness over the official or unofficial perimeter of the boundaries of Town n' Country. ().*

JS: Well, there is no official perimeter.

BR: *I've heard of ().*

JS: The only way that you could get--. Well, when we developed the area, as you're required to do, we filed plats, which are recorded in the public records of Hillsborough County. And we started out with a plat that was Town n' Country Park, Unit #1. And then it kept going on from there, and I forget what the last unit was.

BR: *Do you remember the current street names of what would have been the boundaries of Town n' Country back then?*

JS: Well, in the area that we built and that we platted, probably the boundary was: South of Hillsborough was Kelly Road on the, on the east and, and--

BR: *Memorial?*

JS: --Webb Road on the west, OK, and Memorial Highway on the south. Then we crossed Hillsborough Avenue. When we crossed Hillsborough Avenue, the east boundary of the Town n' Country development was really Sweetwater Creek. And the west boundary at one point--. Well, the west boundary was really, I guess you might say Webb Road. And then we got up to Waters Avenue. The--.

We also developed the first large shopping center in the area, which is now Town n' Country Plaza. Originally, there was an 80,000 square-foot Zayre's store there, but Zayre's went bankrupt. And we ultimately had to divide that property up to--, into smaller space.

Also, when we started the Town n' Country development in 1959, of course, it's outside the corporate limits of the city of Tampa. We went to the city originally and asked the city whether they were willing to extend their water and sewer service to the Town n' Country area. And they said, Well we might be willing to extend our water lines, but not the sewer. So the only way you could develop a large number of houses in an area like this, which tended to be a little low and

swampy at times, we built our own sewer treatment facilities. The original sewer treatment plant, we had a company which we called Sweetwater Utility. The original sewer treatment plant was just north of Memorial Highway. Then--

BR: *What location?*

JS: Just north of Memorial before you get to the houses. You come off Memorial--

BR: *Near Sweetwater Creek.*

JS: Well, no, not near Sweetwater Creek. [Pause] We--. At the time, we also had built in that same area a Little League field and a building for the Town n' Country Park Homeowners Association. That Little League field, I think, doesn't exist anymore, and we built new ones north of Hillsborough Avenue. And I don't know what happened to the building.

We operated this sewer system from 1959, when we started the development, until 1976, at which point the county bought the system from us. Interestingly enough, in most of the years that we owned the system, the sewer rates were like five and six and seven dollars a month. [Chuckle] Once the county took over, they escalated rapidly. [Pause]

What else would you like to cover?

BR: *Apropos with the building codes, were there any--?*

JS: Oh, let me mention one thing. The one area that we did have problems in the Town n' Country area, as you may or may not know: in the old days before there was really adequate drainage in the area, when we got heavy rains, there was some flooding in the Town n' Country area.

Matter of fact, I can remember-- must have been 1961, maybe-- there was one day in which it rained 20 inches in one day- a tremendous amount of rain. And the outflow from the area, which--. Most of our drainage went into Sweetwater Creek or Rocky Creek, but the--, but it--, but then it wasn't necessarily good going from there into the bay until the county improved it.

I remember one day when it rained 20 inches, and there was a lot of water in the Town n' Country area. And I was out here most of the night. And I got home about 3:00 in the morning; the telephone rang. And a very irate woman was on the phone, and she said, "Do you know," she said, "that the water is almost up to the front steps of my house?" And I said, "Yes, ma'am, I do. I've been out there." But I said "You know, it rained 20 inches in the last 24 hours. That's almost an act of God." And she said, "That's the trouble with you damn builders- you're always passing the buck!" [Laughter]

I mean, there are a lot of funny stories that you remember over a period of a long period of time in developing a large subdivision like Town n' Country. It's almost the builder and developer--. For a while, it's almost like running a city.

BR: *I can understand that. Yeah.*

JS: Yeah, you get all the complaints, and we tried to be as good civic citizens as we could be. We donated the school sites; we donated land for Little League fields. At one time, I gave a 25-acre piece of land-- which is just south of Twelve Oaks, I think-- that they now call Shimberg Field, where there's Little League and soccer fields.

BR: *Yeah, it's a great location. It's very well used.*

JS: So--. And I run into people all the time, you know, who say, "Oh," they say, "I bought a house from you in Town n' Country." Because after all, six or seven thousand houses-- that's a lot of houses. And so it's been, it's been a good life for me.

And I've gotten involved in a lot of other things. I was one of the original founders of the University Community Hospital, and was the first chairman of the board. Originally, in 1965 I think, a few of us started a small bank in Town n' Country, which was originally called the Midway Bank. It then--, it eventually was sold to Flagship Banks. And then Flagship Banks were sold to Sun Bank. At one time, I think I was the president of the Flagship Bank in Town n' Country. The original bank was located where a funeral home is now, in the shopping--, in the U-Save shopping center.

BR: *Which later became Freedom Federal.*

JS: Yeah, that's right. So what else can you think of?

BR: *Well, I'm one of those people who bought a home from you. I think we arrived in this area in 1976. So I don't know how--*

JS: So you live south of Hillsborough?

BR: *That's correct.*

JS: Well, if you bought a home in 1976, you may have bought a home that we built.

BR: *I'm sure we did.*

JS: But you didn't buy a new home.

BR: *No, no we didn't.*

JS: That's right. So you bought it from whoever the original purchaser was.

BR: *No, our home was--. Yeah, correct.*

JS: That's right.

BR: *And we've had very good--. We're very content with it- with the product.*

JS: Well, that's good!

BR: *I do have a question now.*

JS: What's that?

BR: *The s--. You said that your company installed the sewage system?*

JS: Yeah.

BR: *And nearly everybody on our block has had trouble with the drainage pipes- the orange--, notorious orange bird drainage pipe.*

JS: I know. That's right; I know that. Back in the '50s-- and you go into the early '60s-- the codes provided that the pipe that connected the house to the sewer line in the road was orange bird pipe.

BR: *Which is--. People would say it's like tar paper [Chuckle]--*

JS: As it turned out--

BR: *--with a 15-year life expectancy.*

JS: As it turned out, the product did not last very long.

BR: *Yeah.*

JS: And so it developed all kinds of problems. And so the majority of the people probably have had to replace the orange bird pipe with something else. That was a failure of the code.

BR: *Oh, OK.*

JS: Honestly! You know, I mean, in other words, that wasn't our choice. The code required that.

BR: *Another thing I've heard is that some of the later houses used aluminum wiring, which was not a good thing.*

JS: That may be. I can't remember that.

BR: *I've heard that from an electrician.*

JS: It'd probably be better to use copper wiring.

BR: *Oh, sure.*

JS: Yeah.

BR: *Another thing: You mentioned that you did not donate the land where Dickenson Elementary School--*

JS: No, we didn't.

BR: *But of course, that's in our backyard.*

JS: Yeah, I know.

BR: *That's one of the reasons that we moved here. But--*

JS: I know it. I forget how the school system acquired that land. They must have bought it from whoever owned it.

BR: *Some of our neighbors, who were there from Day One, they said when that was undeveloped, it was mostly palmettos?*

JS: Mm-hmm. That's right!

BR: *And there were a lot of rattlesnakes.*

JS: Lot of snakes- absolutely. No question about it. Yeah, that's right.

BR: *And--. Well, I'm wondering: Was that blown out of proportion? Or is it ()?*

JS: No, there were a lot of rattlesnakes. I can tell you. I mean, as we developed the land, there were a lot of rattlesnakes. And there were a lot of palmettos, and some of the land tended to be a little swampy.

BR: *Yeah.*

JS: It might be that under today's building requirements and all, you might not be able to develop some of the land that's now Town n' Country, because it had almost a zero elevation. And there's a lot of different rules now that didn't exist in those days.

BR: *How about the land along--. There's some land along Webb Road, in the vicinity of the hospital and then further north along Wilsky Boulevard that looks almost like primeval forest.*

JS: Well, the land north of Town n' Country Hospital on Webb Road is--, could never have been developed. In other words, it was very wet and kind of swampy, which is what you're talking about.

BR: *Yeah, south of the hospital, they are planning to build, I'm sure.*

JS: OK. They may be.

BR: *Yeah.*

JS: But I--. You know, the one thing: There's a lot of people live in Town n' Country, and now there are a lot of organizations, civic associations, Rotary clubs, Town n' Country Alliance, and one thing or another. Originally, the people that lived in Town n' Country were not that politically active. As years passed, I think people learned that the more politically active you were and the more you got involved in things, the more attention you received from local public officials, which--.

And I think we've had some excellent county commissioners who served the Town n' Country area. Interestingly enough, one of the original county commissioners who represented this area was Betty Castor, who went on to be supervisor of--, commissioner of education in Florida, and then president of the University of South Florida. Her daughter, Kathy Castor, is now county commissioner.

BR: *I--. If I understand correctly, one of the things that did bring the community together was the rise of gang problems along Hanley Road. And I've heard it said that it takes a crisis to bring people out of the woodwork.*

JS: Well, I think that's so. But I think now there's a substation of the sheriff's office in the Town n' Country area.

BR: *Mm-hmm. This is true.*

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

JS: --some of the crime problems, because as one of the owners of the shopping center, we had had difficulty at times with break-ins and that type of thing. But in general, I think the sheriff's department does a pretty good job.

They could do a much better job, of course, if they had more money. For good or bad, obviously, public officials are very reluctant to increase people's taxes or fees. So to some extent, you're getting what you pay for. We could have better law enforcement, we could have better schools, we could have better roads and a lot of other things if the public, state, and the county and the city had more money. The people are worried, I think, that if they have too much money, they'll waste it. So it's a delicate balance one way or another.

BR: *Another issue that a lot of people are concerned about is the advent of what they call Section 8 housing. Do you know anything about that, and have you constructed any multi-family dwellings in the area? Any apartments?*

JS: No! We did not build any of the apartments in the area. We--. I did own some of the land up along Hanley Road that I sold years ago to an apartment developer, I think out of Gainesville, who built two apartment complexes on Hanley Road, on the--

BR: *Would that be Cimarron and Landmark?*

JS: Maybe. Yeah, I think so. At one time, we did built certain--, what they called, I think it was called Section 235 housing, which were up around north of Webb Junior High School, where there were certain income requirements as far as buying a house is concerned. And the government subsidized the mortgage payments for the people.

And it worked out quite well except for one thing: As in many instances, if not more--, if not almost all of them-- we must have built two, three hundred Section 235 homes-- the people got a real break when they bought the houses, because the government helped them to pay the interest. As the houses appreciated in value, the people turned around and sold the homes and made a big profit.

The thing that was missing in the program was that they should have required that if you sold your home and you made a big profit, you ought to at least pay back to the government the amount that they subsidized or paid, as far as your mortgage payments was concerned. But they didn't, but that wasn't required.

I don't know myself--. I know what Section 8 housing is. Section 8 housing is a multi-family program involving with the FHA, where there's requirements that a certain percentage of the units be rented to low-income people. Is there a proposal to build such a thing in this area?

BR: I--. My perception is that there's--

JS: I never heard that, but--

BR: --there's concern that apartments would be built which would then be converted.

JS: But where? I mean, where would they be built? There isn't much land left in the area.

BR: Well, there's a nine-acre tract just south of Westgate Baptist School. And recently, there was a proposal to put up some apartments there, but they did not get a zoning permit. There's also--. And this leads to another question.

JS: Of course, that type of thing always leads to great controversy. In other words, the people in the area normally are opposed to that, because they're afraid-- which may be the case or may not be the case-- that it would lead to more crime or whatever the case may be. I don't know that it does.

So the public officials, particularly the county commissioners, whose job it is to approve zoning and that type of thing- they--, they're really put on the spot. In other words, the majority of the people are against it. But there has to be housing for all types of people.

BR: "But not in my backyard."

JS: But not in--. That's right. So that--

BR: How about homeless? Is that--?

JS: Homeless?

BR: Yeah, have you seen that?

JS: I've never seen much homeless in this area, have you?

BR: Oh, yeah, yeah.

JS: Have you?

BR: I would have to say it has to do with the proliferation of restaurants that we have along Hillsborough Avenue, the woodsy areas which still exist, and--. This another thing; I mean, these are human beings.

JS: That's right.

BR: *The city of Tampa cracks down on them, so they come out here. And they need some sort of provision or something; you just can't ignore them.*

JS: Well, this is another thing. In other words, you know, it goes back, unfortunately, to the unfortunate subject of money. The public officials could obviously do a better job if there was more money. Now, in the city of Tampa, I know, they have Metropolitan Ministries that takes care of feeding and sometimes sheltering a lot of homeless people. I don't think that such a thing exists in the county. I don't know whether there is a need for it or not.

BR: *[Chuckle] From personal experience, I would say, Yeah.*

JS: OK.

BR: *There certainly is, but I--. There's sort of an ebb and flow.*

JS: Right.

BR: *You know the--*

JS: This is the type of thing, though, by the way, that it's--, the only way you get anything accomplished--. This is the type of thing that it's important for civic leaders and other people in the community to discuss with your elected public officials, whether it's the county commissioners, the sheriff, or whoever it may be, so that they understand what the needs are in the area.

BR: *Yeah. It's--. We've talked about this in the civic association.*

JS: Right.

BR: *It's hard to get a handle on it.*

JS: Well, it is. I'm sure that's right. [Pause]

BR: *Another issue that's on the table right now, as we speak, is the development plan for Town n'--, the long range development plan.*

JS: Right, right. I know about that. Which involves this very area--

BR: *Exactly.*

JS: --where we're sitting in this library.

BR: *Yeah.*

JS: And the county, who owns the land next to here, is talking about possibly redeveloping this area into a town center, putting in a park. Right?

BR: *Mm-hmm.*

JS: That's--. And possibly also, I believe that the plan envisages that they might sell off part of the land to try to get some townhouses built. You think the community favors this or not?

BR: *That--. [Chuckle] That's a tough--*

JS: Probably a controversial thing.

BR: *It is. And if you look at the--*

JS: Some people are for it; some people are not.

BR: *Yeah. If you look at the latest issue of the Town n' Country newspaper--*

JS: I saw it. I just picked it up.

BR: *Yeah, that's a headline.*

JS: But you know what- there's--. As I say, there must be thousands of people that live in this area. You'll never get all the people to agree on the same thing at the same time. Some people will be for it, for things. Some people will be against it. And then people will say that the leaders of the civic association or the alliance or one thing or another don't speak for all the people.

BR: *Well, they have ample opportunity to come to public meetings.*

JS: But you see, that's the thing. The people tend to criticize, but then when you give them an opportunity to come to a meeting to express their opinions, you'd be surprised how few people come.

BR: *There's a lot of apathy out there.*

JS: That's right.

BR: *Yeah. Do you have an opinion on the development plan that you'd be willing to share?*

JS: Well, I've seen the development plan, and I think, I think basically it would be a good thing. It--. The area that the architects or the planners in Orlando that the county retained show--. They show not only the area that the county owns

where the library is and the senior citizen thing, but they also show the two shopping centers in the area. Well--

BR: *Meaning Town n' Country Plaza and U-Save.*

JS: Town n' Country Plaza and Westgate. Well, that's right. But you know--. I don't know how it--. I don't know when, if ever, the land where those shopping centers would be redeveloped. I mean, they're all subject to long-term leases with the tenants and one thing or another. And it wouldn't be reasonable, I don't think, or in the public interest for the county to buy those shopping centers and redevelop it. So they're really dealing with a fairly limited piece of land.

BR: *I think there's a perception that aesthetically and practically, Hillsborough Avenue could stand a lot of improvement.*

JS: There's no question about it. But--. [Pause]

It just sort of grew. And back in the old--. I mean, looking back--. And it's not only true of Town n' Country, it's true of most other places that you could name.

I'm sure, by the way, that if we had it to do over again, we could do--, we could have done a better job. In--. People thought that all land along major highways like Hillsborough Avenue or Dale Mabry or what it is ought to be commercial. The truth of the matter is that it would have been a lot better if there were certain large shopping areas along Dale Ma--, along Hillsborough Avenue, and some of the land was not commercial.

And it would have been even better than that if there was a requirement-- which there wasn't-- that there be in effect a so-called access road, where, in effect, all of the roads didn't go into a main highway like Hillsborough Avenue. But there was no such requirement, and so you--. Planning in those days was maybe not as far advanced as it is today.

BR: *What changes have you seen in the codes and in community planning?*

JS: Well, certainly--. Well, there's a lot more emphasis now on planning than there was. The county, for instance, never used to be really concerned about planning. I mean, if you--. They had zoning la--, rules, and a lot of the land in Hillsborough County was not zoned. And if you wanted to build whatever it is you wanted to build, you made an application for zoning and you went down before the county commission and they either approved it or denied it.

But at no point, up until fairly recently, did the county or the city, you know, ever say, Well, let's see- let's come up with a plan to make some of these areas better. And now, which I think is a very good thing, they are now doing that. The only thing is that you can't start from zero. You can't start from hundreds of

acres of vacant land. You're limited with what exists on the land, and you got to try to do the best you can from there.

BR: *How about funding? Is--? Do they tend to plan in advance of their available resources?*

JS: Hmm.

BR: *This is something that I just don't know. And I'm wondering to what extent it applies in the Town n' Country development plan, because one of the issues is the--, whether or not to have condominiums or apar--*

JS: Yeah, townhouses.

BR: *-- or dwellings right next to where we sit now.*

JS: Yeah, I know it. I was a little surprised myself when I saw that in the plan. Now, whether there is a need or a demand for townhouses like that in this immediate area, I don't really know. There might be.

BR: *Can you assume that that's been researched before it was ()?*

JS: I'm under the impression-- I can't remember the name-- that Hillsborough County hired a planning firm, which I think is out of Orlando.

BR: *Canning, I think. Canning Associates.*

JS: OK- which I think is supposed to be a well-regarded architectural and planning firm. And so they probably did some research as to what the need would be for such a thing.

BR: *This has been presented as Oh--, as sort of an expeditionary force in the area ().*

JS: Well, they're talking about the same thing in the Citrus Park area. They're talking about it in the area near the University of South Florida. It's something new, by the way, I can tell you. The county was never involved in this type of thing before. It's probably a good thing, but you won't get all the people to agree to any one thing at one time.

BR: *Do you know of any places elsewhere in the state where it's worked successfully?*

JS: Most of the planning of things has been done by private builders and developers, who planned communities, and then they went to whatever the public body was to get their approval. It's fairly new that the planning in some

instances would be done by public bodies themselves, and then try to get private builders or developers to build in accordance with the plan. That's fairly new. I don't know of any place just offhand where that's been done. It probably has been, but I just don't know.

BR: *How about the issue of transparency- making public-- on the county side-- making public the plans every step along the way? And I would add parenthetically--*

JS: Well, what do you mean by transparency? You mean--?

BR: *That the public knows what's going on.*

JS: Well, I think that's a good thing, isn't it?

BR: *Sure. ().*

JS: In other words, the public's entitled to know what's going on. There's too much criticism of secrecy in government.

BR: *Well, do you--? Have you seen advances in this? Because I remember talking to planners, and they said that the days from when you would plan from on top are gone. And that's why they have the public meetings.*

JS: Yeah. Well, that's right. No question about that. That's a lot better now than it ever was before. The only thing that's missing is that you don't get enough public participation in those meetings.

BR: *And when you do, it's often controversy.*

JS: Well, that's right. But that's democracy in action, I guess.

BR: *Right, right. I have something in a sort of a different area I would like to ask.*

JS: What's that?

BR: *The protection of the environment-- and the flora and the fauna especially, that-- how is it changed?*

JS: Oh, by the way, you've talked about codes and one thing or another. The one thing that has changed drastically over the years is environmental regulations. In other words, back when we first came to Florida and developed Town n' Country, there really were no environmental regulations.

Now there is much more protection of wildlife, of plants of various sorts. There's all kind of land that is environmentally sensitive that you can't get approval to

build, because they want to preserve the original fauna and one thing or another. Some builders and developers think that they've overdone that a little. But it all depends which side of the desk you sit on.

And also, in other areas--. And this has happened in Hillsborough County some years ago: I think it was in a public vote they created what they called ELAPP, which was a program that got a small amount of tax funds each year, and they used it to buy up environmentally sensitive areas in the county. And they bought up, over the years, thousands of acres of land- not much, to my knowledge, in this area, but in other parts of the county, they bought up a lot. And that was land that is--, will never be developed and will stay in the natural state that it is and obviously is good environmentally.

BR: I think there's a tract south of Memorial that's been set aside as a nature preserve--

JS: Could be.

BR: --and also farther, farther west along Hillsborough Avenue and Tampa Road, where that Hillsborough Park is.

JS: Right, right. I think that's maybe right.

BR: Yeah. I just--. As a long-time resident, I can think of days when my kids were growing up, and they would report seeing alligators, otters in Sweetwater Creek.

JS: Well, that's right.

BR: There used to be-- I don't know how they got there-- peacocks, with--. You'd see them strolling across Kelly Road.

JS: Yeah.

BR: I guess they got out of Busch Gardens or something.

JS: Well, I don't know.

BR: I've seen parrots, bobcats.

JS: You know, by the way, up where I live in Carrollwood, there's one street, Orange Grove Drive, where there's always been peacocks.

BR: Oh, yeah?

JS: And you still see them on the road.

BR: *Are they wild?*

JS: Yeah, they're wild. They've always lived in that area.

BR: *How about snakes?*

JS: Well, of course, I've seen lots of snakes over the years, but as you get more development-- as the land gets developed and one thing or another-- there tends to be less snakes. [Pause] [Chuckle]

Well, Bill, I think we've covered a wide range of topics. Don't you think?

BR: *Well--. And I've learned an awful lot. And if you're like me, you'll think of things you wanted to say after the "Off" button.*

JS: Well, oh sure- you always think of things afterward. But anyway, I--

BR: *I do want to thank you for sharing with us.*

JS: All right. And I appreciate you inviting me.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[END OF INTERVIEW]